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THE 31
Evil and Remedy
OF
SCANDAL.
A
Practical Discourse
ON
PSALM CXIX. clxv.

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By John Barret, Minister of the Gospel.

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T O T H E

R E A D E R.

Christian READER,

THE abounding of Scandals, in these evil Days wherein we live, makes the Subject treated of in the following Discourse but too Necessary. As for the Manner of handling, it is above my Commendation. The learned and pious Author's published Works *, besides the long Course of his useful Ministerial Labours, principally at Nottingham, do abundantly praise him in the Gates. If any should be so foolishly nice as to cavil at the plainness of the Authors Stile, let them know his business is with their Hearts and Consciences, and ample Experience, (besides the Apostle's Caution and Example, 1 Cor. 2. 1. 4.) may convince us, that studied Periods, contribute nothing to the saving of Souls, which is the great End of the Ministry which we have received of the Lord, and are under so awful Obligations to fulfil.

* Treatise of the Two Covenants, Christian Temper, of Pardon of Sin, Secret Prayer, &c.

To the Reader.

The Words which the Holy Ghost teacheth (or hath taught, 1 Cor. 2. 13.) will, by all competent Judges, be esteemed the most proper and effectual.

May the following Discourse be succeeded by an abundant Blessing from above, to give a powerful check to growing Scandal! The Author and Publisher will then reckon their End happily attained; Nor will they who reap Benefit by it, deny their earnest Prayers, (which are hereby seriously requested) for both.

May the great God (who only can) teach every Reader to profit, is the hearty desire of

One who is earnestly Solicitous for the
Churches Purity and Peace.

JOHN BILLINGSLEY.

T H E

THE
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PSALM CXIX. clxv.

Great Peace have they which love thy Lam, and nothing shall offend them. Or, (as in the Hebrew) they shall have no Stumbling-block.

THAT Faithful Servant of Christ, Mr. Jer. Dyke, considering how frequently *Scandals* fell out, and what a World of *Mischief* attended the same; it induced him to publish his *Treatise of the Mischief of Scandals*, Anno Dom. 1631, very near Fourscore Years since. He greatly wondering that none of our English Divines before, (so far as he could learn) had treated on that Subject. 'Tis certainly a *very needful Subject* for God's Ministers to preach on at this Day, if it may be, to put a *stop to the Increase* of Scandals; or to *prevent*, or check the Malignant, *pernicious Influence* thereof.

O that what is here offered concerning Scandals, Offences, (thro' the Blessing of Heaven) may have some good Success and Effect; without any ones *taking Offence*.

Great Peace, even inward Spiritual Peace, Sweet Tranquillity and Serenity of Mind *have they, or is, or shall be to them which Love thy*

Law, who sincerely obey thy Commands, from a principal of Love to thee, and them.

And nothing shall offend them, they shall have no *Stumbling-Block*. Whereunto the Septuagint also agrees, ἐκ ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς σκάνδαλον, there is no Scandal to them, Dr. Hammond compares this with the like Phrase I John 2. 10. He that loveth his Brother abideth in the Light, καὶ σκάνδαλον οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐκ, and there is no Scandal in, or unto him. Though such are not free from *Sins of Infirmary*, yet under God's Favour and Protection by his Power and Grace, they are ordinarily kept from those Snare and Temptations which others fall into.

Here are Two Propositions that ly plain before us.

Prop. 1. Great Peace is, or shall be to such as love God's Law.

2. They that love God's Law, are ordinarily safest from the great Evil of Scandal, which is the Point I especially aim at in the following Discourse.

Who are they that love God's Law? The truly Gracious, who are sincerely devoted to God, and to his Service: *Who have his Law put in their inward Parts, and written in their Hearts*, (Jer. 31. 33.) who delight in the Law of God, after the inward Man, (Rom. 7. 22.) who obey from the Heart, and who love the Law of the Lord even for its Purity, (Psal. 119. 140.) and therefore would have a Respect unto all God's Commands; as they esteem his Precepts concerning all Things to be right.

Such are ordinarily *safest from Scandal*. Take the Word [*Scandal*] in the largest Sense, and the love of God's Holy Law is a special Means to keep us both from *giving*, and from *taking* Offence, or *Scandal*. Though such as love God's Law, are subject to stumble and fall, through Infirmary, yea, sometimes they have very sore Falls, through some sudden, violent *push of Temptation*, yet they rise after their Fall: Their slips and falls are not to their utter Ruin; and for the most part 'tis their care to walk *inoffensively*, so as not to be *Scandals*, to occasion others *Stumbling*. They would not give Offence to others, as by their Example or other wise draw, or encourage others to Sin. And further, such are not so apt *causlessly* to take Offence at others, or where Offence is given, to be so *Scandalized*, as to be turned out of the Way of their Duty, out of God's Way.

As to the Term Scandal, [σκάνδαλον] which the LXXII. here uses, it is perfectly Parallel in the threefold Notion of it, to the Word in the Hebrew *, signifying a *Stumbling-block*, and a Snare, and a *Gall-trap*, as Dr. Hammond.

Here to open the Nature of *Scandals*, Offences, with what convenient brevity I can.

First, The common Distinction of *Scandal*, or Offence *Given*; and *Scandal*, or Offence *taken*, is not more common than necessary, which some do otherwise express, to wit, by the Terms of *Active* and *Passive Scandal*. The Words [*Given*] and [*Taken*] are used here

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in a *moral Sense*, as signifying on which Hand the fault lieth. So by *Scandal given* we are to understand *culpably given*, whether others take it, or no. And by *Scandal taken*, that which is *culpably taken*, when oft no Scandal was *culpably given*.

Sometimes there is *Scandal given*, but not *taken*, as *Matth. 16. 23.* *Thou art an Offence (a Scandal) to me.* When Peter went about to dissuade his Lord and Master from Suffering, which was to take him off from his undertaken Work for our Redemption. This was a *Scandal in its own Nature*, though not in the event and effect. An *Aptitudinal Scandal*, but not an *Actual Scandal* unto Christ; no *Stumbling-block* to Him, who could not be moved the least step out of his Way.

Again, sometimes there is *Scandal taken*, where none was given; So Christ, and the Gospel was a *Stone of Stumbling* to many, *1 Pet. 2. 8.* and *1 Cor. 1. 23.* Their *Stumbling* and taking Offence, whether at the Person, or at the Doctrine of Christ was most *unjust, unjustifiable*, without Ground, without Excuse.

Again, sometimes *Scandal* is both *given and taken*: One casting a *Stumbling-block* in others way, and others falling at it: As upon Peter's Judaizing, *Gal. 2. 12, 13.*

Some distinguish betwixt *Scandal*, that is only an *Occasion of others Grief*; and *Scandal*, that is an *Occasion of others Sin*. But though 'tis *against Charity*, unnecessarily to occasion others Grief and Trouble: Yet that is not the *Sin of giving Scandal* (as the Word is generally used in the New Testament.) And many really offend others, cast a *Stumbling-block*, a *Scandal* in their Way, even in *pleasing them*, as when it tends to confirm them in any Error, or unwarrantable Practice, as in the Apostle Peter's Case, *Gal. 2.* And on the other hand, we may do that, whereat others are grieved and displeased, without incurring the just Censure, or Charge of *giving Scandal*. It oft falleth out, that some, or other will Censure their fellow Christians, will be displeased, and take Offence even at their Brethren, for doing what is not only *lawful*, but *expedient*, or their *Duty*. But in doing what we ought to do, we are not guilty of *Scandal*, though it may prove a *Scandal to others*, when they are *unreasonably* moved, and disquieted at it; and are thus cast into sinful Passions, and Censures, and hindred in the way of their Duty towards God, or Man. In this case there is *Scandal unjustly taken*, and the fault is only in themselves who take Offence.

Further, take Notice, there are *various Ways*, or *Means*, whereby others may be scandalized. One may occasion others stumbling or falling, either by his Speech, or Practice, or by Omissions, or by direct Opposition. And,

(1.) By his Words. As, 1. *Insinuating Instilling Errors* into the Minds of others; *Tainting*, *Corrupting* their Judgments. Some there are, whose Words eat as a *Canker*, or a *Gangrene*, *2 Tim. 2. 17.* They lay a *Snare*, they set a *Trap*, to catch other Mens Souls; who

are seeking with enticing Words to inveigle, and draw them into pernicious Errors; there are *damnable Heresies*, in their Nature destructive unto Souls. 2. Or by *Evil Counsel*, Perswasions, Promises, Threatnings, &c. prejudicing others against, or discouraging them from the good ways of God; or drawing others into any Evil, unwarrantable Course, and Practice.

(2.) By ones Practice. As, 1. By doing Things evil in themselves. Thus others may be encouraged unto, or more harden'd in the like evil Practice, *evil Examples*, and especially of Men in Power, or of great repute for their Learning, or of such as have been noted Professors, have ordinarily a very powerful *malignant Influence* upon many; so the *bad Examples* of Ministers, who should know better Things. *Mal. 2. 8.* The Priests departing out of the Way, caused many to stumble at the Law.

2. By an imprudent Use, or rather Abuse of Christian Liberty. Things that are lawful in themselves, are not at all Times Expedient, 1 Cor. 8. 9. Take heed lest by any Means this Liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. Christians ought to forbear the use of their Liberty, when they may foresee the use thereof would be to other prejudice and hurt; as when it may tempt them unto what, to them is unlawful. *Rom. 14. 13, 14.* and verse 20. As one says [*Catholic Hierarchy*, printed in 1681. p. 44.] Though the Offence may be but a reputed, or supposed one by the offended Party, and the Offence unjustly taken as to the Thing, or Action; yet it may be justly charged on the offending Party too, who is as well acquainted with the weakness of his Brother, as with the indifferency of the Action. [And see Baxter's Paraphrase on the Scripture last cited.]

Indeed about the use of indifferent Things, we are to follow the Direction both of Faith and Charity, if we would not stumble here, and also occasion others to stumble. 1. We must be well assured, put out of doubt by God's Word, that the Thing we call indifferent, be such in itself. 2. Charity must set Bounds to the use of our Liberty in a Thing Indifferent; that we use it not to the Offence and Scandal of our weak Brethren. For that were not to walk charitably.

Though I may not venture upon a Sin, to keep another from Sinning (I may not do evil that good may come) neither may I neglect or omit my present Duty, notwithstanding I may foresee that another will make it an Occasion of his Sin; yet Charity binds me in a matter left to Liberty, which is in my Power to use, or to forbear the use of, I say, Charity binds me to take that part which is freest, safest from being an occasion of others Sin and Fall.

(3.) Not only by ones Practice, but by the omission of his Duty, may a Man lay a Scandal, a Snare, a Stumbling-block before others, and occasion their Fall; As by Silence, and Connivance, when one hath a Call, and Opportunity to oppose Error; or to Reprove, or Admonish a Sinner after some ungodly deed committed; he may thus

hem in contribute to their hardening in Sin; and may occasion others consenting thereunto, by not shewing his dislike, by not entering his dissent. And so by omission of other Duties. As if those that live with us, may know, that we take no time for secret Duties; is not that a tempting and encouraging them to the like sinful Omission? One that is known to his House-fellows to make no account of secret Duties, is doing his part to Teach, or perswade them, that to keep up these is a doing more than needeth.

(4.) By Persecution, or hard usage of others under their Power, deterring others from the Way of their Duty, or driving them upon Sin; this way Men are great *Stumbling-blocks* in others way. Paul, before his Conversion) was for compelling Men to blaspheme, Acts 26. 11. And when Governours, Parents, Masters of Families, by using rigour set themselves to discourage those under them from the Good and the Right Way, or to urge them unto that which is displeasing to God, and would be a wounding of their Consciences; here is a fore Temptation. So Persecution is a great Block, that many cannot get over. When Tribulation and Persecution ariseth because of the Word, many are offended, Math. 13. 21: and chap. 24. 9, 10. And that dreadful Threatning denounced against those that shall offend one of Christ's little ones, Math. 18. 6. It seems especially to have Reference to offending any such by injuring, by persecuting them, if thereby they might discourage them from following Christ, from adhering to his Truth and Interest. 'Tis such offending, as is there opposed to the Receiving, Owning, Countenancing, and Encouraging one of Christ's little ones.

Here I have shewed various Ways of giving Offence, of being a *Stumbling-block* to others; as also it has fallen in my Way, to shew how others are *Scandalized*, or take Offence.

Now further take Notice, There is a Difference of those that are giving Scandal. As some do it from a worse Principle, and some with worse Effects.

Some give Scandal from a worse Principle than others; when some offend here only *per imperitiam*, through Ignorance, and Weakness; others *per negligentiam*, through carelessness and Negligence, which is worse; others offend *per malitiam*, of set Purpose, wilful Wickedness, and Malice, which is worst of all. How *Diabolical* is it to contrive and design others falling into Sin, (for ought they know) to their Soul's everlasting Ruin.

Yet they that do hurt to Souls, should not take it for a sufficient Excuse, that they intended no such Thing. Would you not think a Servant guilty of great carelessness, and very blame-worthy, who had set scalding Water, or Liquor in a young Child's way, that falls in to it, without intending the scalding of the Child? Suppose you un-equally yoke your Children in Marriage, with Idolaters, or others of dangerous, corrupt Principles; though you did not intend their seduction,

duction, yet you are guilty of laying a Snare, or Stumbling-block before them.

Again, *The Effects of Scandal* are various. Tho' all are Evil, Dangerous, and to be avoided, yet some have a more malignant Influence, and more pernicious Effects, than others.

Some Scandals tend to draw Men into some particular Sin, or Error; or to draw them off from some particular Truth, or Duty. Some Scandals tend to harden Men in a sinful State and Course, and to prejudice them against the way of Godliness, and an holy Life.

Some Scandals tend to the quenching of Love, and the breach of Peace; some to the subverting of Faith, and lead to downright Infidelity, and to Apostacy. Thus they differ in degree.

And some Scandals have a more remote Tendency to others Fall and Ruin; other Scandals have a more direct and immediate tendency thereunto.

In the next place I come to shew whence it is that they that love God's Law, are ordinarily freest from giving Offence, or Scandal.

(1.) Such are in the Light, God's Word is a Lamp unto their Feet, and a Light unto their Path, as here, *verse 105*. They are far from loving Darkness. They are not willingly ignorant of their Duty, how they ought to walk. They seek God's Precepts; They pray, that the Lord would teach them his Statutes: These are the Men of their Counsel. They that walk in Darkness, are most subject to stumble and fall. But they that love God's Law are in the Light, and are for walking in the Light, and for walking Circumspectly. As they fear stumbling and falling themselves; so they fear giving occasion of stumbling to others.

(2.) They love God, who love his Law. *And this is the love of God that we keep his Commandments*. And the greater care they have to keep God's Commands, the more free from giving Scandal. If any take Offence at their strict walking and following the Thing that is good, 'tis a Thing they cannot help: 'Tis their Sin that take offence. Again, they that love God, are grieved to see or hear God dishonoured by others, *Psal. 119. 158. I beheld the Transgressors, and was grieved*. Then must it not be grievous to such, if at any time they have given occasion to others to dishonour him? Then how grievous must it be to them, if the Name of God should be blasphemed through them by their Means?

(3.) They that love God's Law, have a Love to others, and especially to the Souls of others. Love is the virtual fulfilling of the Law, *Rom. 13. 8, 9, 10. And love worketh no ill to his Neighbour*. Then would it not be far from hurting the Souls of others, as laying stumbling blocks before them? A due love to others would incline one to sorrowfulness, when he sees others scandalized, stumbling, and falling. It would cause something of that inward Grief and Trouble, the Apostle

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ostle speaks of, 2 Cor. 11. 29: *Who is offended, and I burn not?* Then shall not such a one fear, being as a stumbling-block in others way? True love wisheth well to the Souls of others. But how could we do others a worse turn, than to tempt and draw them to Sin, to hinder them in the Way of true Piety? Then surely, love would never put Men upon persecuting work, that way to lay a stumbling-block before others. And to design the ensnaring of others, is so contrary to a Christian Spirit, and to the Grace of love; that it would rather shew Men *Children of the Devil*, who was a *Murderer from the beginning*.

(4.) They that love God's Law, have a *love to Religion*, and would be concerned for its Interest. That they forget themselves, they care not like themselves, when they do any thing that tends to the *Reproach of Religion*; that may breed, or increase in others a dislike of it; and thus *obstruct its Interest*. This way some may be hinder'd from coming over, who were inclining towards it, and some again discouraged, who had made some entrance. Thus it may appear upon several accounts, that they that love God's Law, are not so apt to give scandal as others.

Then Secondly, To shew that they that love God's Law, are not so apt to be *Scandalized*, to take Offence as others.

But take Notice, For a Christian to be *offended and grieved at the sins* of others, as Offences against God, Transgressions of his holy Law; this is not the *taking Offence*, or Scandal here spoken of. It were to be wished, that there were more *Indignation* against Sin, more *orrow for Sin* amongst us, whereforever we see it; it being a Grace, a Virtue, and what the love of God's Law inclineth Souls unto. But an Offence or Scandal taken, there is sinful weakness at least, and sometimes great Wickedness. *Many take offence, where none is given*. The unbelieving *Jews* were offended at Christ's Person. He was not such a Saviour as they expected. And *Matth. 15. 12*. The *Pharisees* were offended at his Doctrine.

That is *properly Scandal taken*, when one taketh occasion from what another is, or doth, to Sin, or is hinder'd in a course of Piety, in the way of his Duty, to his Soul's ruin, or at least to his Soul's hurt and damage.

Now they that love God's Law, are not so apt, as others, thus to take Offence, or to frame Scandals to themselves. For,

(1.) If some are *giving Scandal*, unto such as love God's Law, 'Tis wont to be matter of Mourning: 'Tis a *sad sight* to them, that any by their scandalous Practice should give great occasion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; should open foul Mouths, to speak reproachfully of the good Ways of God, and of his Servants, and thus lay a *Stumbling-block* in others way, and sin against their own Souls, expose them to ruin. Now they that are Mourning upon such accounts, for Scandals given, are *safer from taking Offence*, so as to fall upon those Scandals.

(2.) They

(2.) They that love God's Law, are for chusing the Way of his Precepts, and for walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord, blameless. They would not dare in their ordinary course to set aside any known Command, or allow of any known Sin; so if they see others setting a bad Example, they very well know, that others slip, and falls, are for their Caution, not for their Imitation.

(3.) They that love God's Law, have a love to Religion, so that they will not have worse Thoughts of Religion; because that some, who make a Profession, walk unsuitably. They will not forsake God's Worship, and Ordinances, because some Professors fall off, and turn their backs on his Ordinances; and some again by their loose lives are a Reproach, and Disgrace to them.

(4.) They that love God's Law, receive the Truth in the love of it. They are for holding fast the Profession of their Faith. They would not forsake known Truth. They that embrace the Truth, not for any foreign Reasons, or by-ends, and respects; but from a sincere love of the Truth, will love and own it still, tho' others desert it, and cause the way of Truth to be evil spoken of.

(5.) They that love God's Law, are not so apt to stumble at the Cross. When Tribulation or Persecution ariseth because of the Word, such would not be offended; so as to turn out of God's Way, to shun the Cross. Many Waters cannot quench love. Besides, they are wont to enjoy sweet Peace within, keeping in God's way, which puts them in good Heart, when they meet with Tribulation in the World.

(6.) They that love God's Law, are far from rejoicing in Iniquity, in other Men's Sins. They that rejoice and take pleasure in the scandalous falls of others, (tho' it may sound strange to some) are scandalized with a Witness, are guilty of Offence taken in a most high degree. Whether they are pleased in having such evil Examples, to plead in excuse for their doing the like? Or whether they rejoice in the occasion of crying shame on those, towards whom they were ill-affected for the Profession they made, and then that they can take occasion to cast reproach upon Religion itself? 'Tis not to be imagined, that they that love God's Law should be guilty of taking such Offence.

(7.) They that love God's Law, would not take Offence at the good seen in others. There are that take Offence at others doing their Duty. Many are offended at faithful Ministers not shunning to declare all the Counsel of God, dealing plainly with Sinners, admonishing, reproving Sinners; telling them the Truth, what they must expect, except they repent, and turn to God. Many are offended at the best Christians, who walk with greatest Circumspection, who are Zealous, and active in their Places for God, and of exemplary Piety: Such are an Eye-sore unto many. *Psal. 69. 9, 10. The Zeal of thine House hath eaten me up, and the Reproaches of them that reproached thee, are fallen upon me. When I wept and chastened my Soul with fasting, that was to my Reproach.* But is not a sign of a Wicked Heart, a graceless Spirit in such, as take

Offence

Offence at others, more Righteous than themselves, when they are in the Way of their Duty? They that love God's Law, will dread being guilty of such Offence taken, as to be full of Envy and Malignity against God's Saints and Servants, for no other cause then their earnest following the Thing that is good.

(8.) When the love of God's law includes the love of our Neighbour; of our Brother, this twofold love would teach and incline one to put as favourable a Construction as he ought, in Charity upon others Speeches and Actions. When Pride, Envy, Malice, and Ill-will, prompt Men to take what others say, and do in the worst Sense, and to aggravate others failings: 'Tis far from the Genius and Disposition of Christian Charity, which believeth all Things, hopeth all Things, 1 Cor: 13: 7. Charity inclineth to the most favourable Opinion of others, till the contrary is evident: And thus the love of God's Law, and of our Brother, is a special Means to keep Christians from rash Censuring, and taking Offence at others unjustly, without ground.

(9.) He that loveth God's Law, and loveth his Brother, (as the law of God requires) he would not hate an offending Brother in his Heart; he would not that Sin should rest upon him. He would pity, and pray for him; And then should he not Admonish him, where there is hope and opportunity of contributing that way towards his Recovery? Love would be for removing Stumbling-blocks out of others way; for preventing others falling; as it would be glad to contribute towards the raising of such as are fallen. Then shall it do nothing towards the preventing of ones stumbling, and falling upon others? Sure, it is, a good preservative to keep one from taking Offence to his own hurt.

Before I come to the Use and Improvement of the Doctrine, there is a Question, or Two to be answered.

Quest. 1. Whether is it possible for one to live here free from all Scandal, both given, and taken.

Ans. Tho' it is a thing to be greatly bewailed, that Scandals do so often fall out; Scandal given, and Scandal taken, and both culpable. And that not only by such as make an outward Profession, and 'tis to be feared, go no further; but even by such, as it may be hoped, have a good Principle within, and are right in the Main, who miscarry from remainders of Corruption in them, for want of due Circumspection, and Consideration, &c. when yet Sin hath not dominion over them: Yet there is no impossibility in the thing; but a Christian with due care, by the help of Divine Grace, might avoid, and keep free from both Kinds of Scandal.

(1.) As to Scandal given, it was that the Apostle prayed for, on the behalf of the believing Philippians, Phil. 1: 9. 10. That they might be sincere, and without Offence till the Day of Christ. Though they were not absolutely free from Sin here, yet they might be free from Scandal; not giving Offence, or occasion of Sin to others. And blessed be God, there

there have been, and there are many, whose lives have been free from any matter of gross Scandal. The most quick-sighted of their Enemies, and Observers, have not been able to lay to their Charge, any foul Miscarriage; but only such failings and *Infirmities*, as the holiest and best Men upon Earth have been, and are subject unto; and these *not allowed, not indulged*; but upon occasion freely confessed, seriously bewailed, heartily prayed against: Upon which account they cannot properly be said to *give occasion to others to indulge Sin* in themselves; to Sin presumptuously, deliberately, and wilfully. And what may we think of *Job's Conversation*? Was not his Life free from Scandal, according to the Divine Testimony given of him, *Job* 1. 8. So *Daniel*, his Enemies despaired of finding any occasion against him, *except concerning the Law of his God*, *Dan.* 6. 4, 5. So *Zachary and Elizabeth*, *Luke* 1. 8. They were both *Righteous before God, walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord, blameless*. And see, *1 Thes.* 2. 10. Ye are Witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved our selves among you that believe.

(2.) Though there are many that have made a Profession, give Scandal; some by falling off from the Truth into pernicious Ways of error, and others to profaneness and a course of loose Living; yet ordinarily sound, serious, and experienced Christians, hold on their Way, and are not scandalized, so as to forsake the good and the right Way, Faithful *Elijah* would still cleave to the Lord, even when he seemed to be left alone: But at that time the Lord had reserved to himself *Seven Thousand Men who had not bowed the Knee to Baal*, *Rom.* 11. 4. However others are warping and turning aside into crooked Ways; yet such as are well-grounded, and upright in the Way, are ordinarily seen to hold on, and not to stumble at the falls of others.

Quest. 2. But how is it true of every one that loves God's Law, that there is no Scandal, no Stumbling-block to such? *David* had a great love to God's Law, (as he professeth in this Psalm;) and yet he fell foully.

Ans. We are not to understand the Text so, as if all such were absolutely free from Scandal, but comparatively they are ordinarily more free than others; not so apt to give, or take offence as other. And the more that they walk in the Light of God's Law, and the more ardent, and constant their Love is to it; the safer they are from the Sin and danger of Scandal.

Or, though they that love God's Law through remaining Corruption, and a sore push of Temptation, sometimes stumble and fall; yet not so commonly, nor so dangerously as others. Tho' *David* when he fell so foully, paid dear for it: *It brake his Peace*; He could not but complain of *broken Bones*: Yet he recovered of his Fall; The falls of such as love God's Law, are not so mischievous and deadly to them. And tho' sometimes such are scandalized, and their feet are slipping, yet not so as to *Apostatize* from God and his Ways, to their utter Ruin.

Use it

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Use 1. For Caution, Christians, let us take heed both of giving Offence, or Scandal, take heed of being *Stumbling-blocks* to others, and also of being scandalized of stumbling at others.

(1.) Let the love of God's Law, the love of Religion, make us very cautious, that we lay no *stumbling-block* in others way; that we be not guilty of *active Scandal*. Here I would offer something, first by way of Motive. 2dly, by way of Direction.

By way of Motive. (1.) There is an expresse prohibition against giving Offence to others, 1 Cor. 10. 32. Give none Offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God. Walk so inoffensively, as not to give occasion of stumbling, by doing any thing unnecessarily, either to those without, or within the Church. Do nothing unnecessarily, tending to other Souls hurt.

(2.) To give Offence and Scandal to others, is going cross to the choicest and best Examples. 'Tis not following Christ's Example, as Christians ought to do; to prevent Scandal, he willingly receded from his Right and Privilege: He being the Son of the universal King, the Lord and Heir of all Things—could such as of right were his Subjects, rightfully demand Tribute from him? Notwithstanding, said he, Matth. 17. 27. lest we should offend them, go—He would not give them occasion to think, or speak ill of him; he would prejudice not them against his Person or Doctrine: Tho' indeed, when the Pharisees were ready to take Offence at his Doctrine, where none was given, there was no cause for his concealing wholesome, and necessary Truth, for their taking distaste, who were more for their vain Traditions, See Matth. 15. 12, 14. The Apostle Paul's great care, (as a follower of Christ) was not to give Offence in any thing; to prejudice others against the Gospel, to occasion others to stumble and fall, 2 Cor. 6. 3. and 1 Cor. 8. 13. If Meat make my Brother to offend, (says he) I will eat no Flesh while the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to offend. Herein he was a follower of Christ; he was not for pleasing himself, but others, for their good to Edification. For even Christ pleased not himself, Rom. 15. 1, 2, 3.

(3.) Ought not Christians to do what in them lieth; to prevent Scandal, or to remove *Stumbling-blocks* out of others way, so far as they can? Then how ill done of us is it, if we ourselves are giving Scandal, are laying any *stumbling-block* before others?

(4.) To love their, and others Souls especially, is a great duty, whereunto the Law of Nature, and Christ's Evangelical Law, both do oblige us. To lay Snakes, or *Stumbling-blocks* in others way, whereby they are in danger of falling into Sin, to their Soul's ruin, or hurt at least! To do that which tendeth to harden the Hearts of Sinners, or to wound weak Consciences, is not to love them. Be it but by an unreasonable use of our Liberty, to draw others to the practice of that which is sin to them, is a great wrong to them, and uncharitableness with a Witness, 1 Cor. 8. 11.

(5.) Yea, and such wounding others weak Consciences is not only a wrong to them, but it is sinning against Christ, 1 Cor. 8. 12. *shall the weak Brother perish, (through our Means) for whom Christ died.* Rom. 14. 15. *Destroy not him with thy Meat, for whom Christ died.* Shall we make so light of the Salvation of Souls, which could not be purchased but by the most precious Blood of Christ? And shall we do that, which tendeth to rob Christ of any Souls, that are his by Right, (who is Lord of all?) Is not this a great Wrong to Christ? And is it not a great sin any way to oppose his Interest, and to obstruct his great Work of saving Souls? How opposite is that to serving the Lord Christ.

(6.) Giving Scandal is a serving our grand Adversary, the Devil. And promoting his great Work and Design, which is tempting to sin, and so to ruin them. And how sad is it, when Christians instead of serving, and following Christ; endeavouring what in them lieth, to promote the Salvation of others, to be instrumental (under Christ) in saving Souls from Death, (as Jam. 5. 19, 20.) How sad, when such (though they do not intend it) are any way serving Satan, tempting others to sin, which is not the way to save them from Death.

(7.) If we care not tho' we give Scandal to others, would not that shew, we have little (if any) care of our own Souls? Thus, Alas! Our sin becomes double. Are we not partakers of other Men's Sins, who are scandalized by us? What, have we not sin enough of our own, but we must partake with others in their Sins? Should we not tremble to think of being called to account for the sins that others have fallen into; having been misled, encouraged by our Example? If others perish by our Means, can we say, that we are clear from the Blood of such.

(8.) And should not that wo, Christ hath denounced against such as give Offence, be as a Flaming Sword, to deter us from such a course, or practice? 'Tis mischievous to those that take Offence, Matth. 18. 7. *Wo unto the World because of Offences.* And no less mischievous to such as give Offence: As it follows there, *But wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh.* To put a Stumbling-block before the blind, was as wicked a Thing, as to make the blind to wander out of the Way, which was enough to lay one under a Curse. Compare Lev. 19. 14. with Deut. 27. 18. Eternal wo and misery is included in what Christ threatneth unto those by whom Offences come, without Repentance, and cutting off, and casting away those Things that offend, how dear soever they have been to one before. As it follows, Matth. 18. 8, 9. *Wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh. Wherefore if thy Hand, or thy Foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: It is better for thee to enter into Life halt or maimed, rather than (with those offending Members) to be cast into everlasting Fire.*

I come next to lay down some Rules, Directions, that may be of use to preserve Christians from giving Scandal.

(1.) Get a sound Judgment, and Conscience rightly informed, to see your way clear, that you may be able to distinguish betwixt Truth

and Error, betwixt Good and Evil: Yea, that you may be able to discern not only *Things evil in Themselves*, but also *Things evil by Accident*, to avoid them. How great Multitudes are there, that offend God, and give offence to others, through ignorance, not knowing that they do evil? And many are under a great mistake, accounting some things *matters of Christian Liberty*, which under such Circumstances are matters of Scandal. Things lawful in themselves, are not at all times Expedient, 1 Cor. 10. 23. and chap. 8. 9. We are not to use our Liberty, when it would be a *stumbling-block* to them that are weak; that is an occasion of sin to them: That were not to *walk charitably*. 'Tis an abuse of our Liberty, to use it contrary to the Gospel-rule, to the hurt of weak Brethren.

But you may ask what is to be done, when there is no avoiding offence, whether we use our Liberty, or use it not? As Persons of contrary Minds, will be apt to take Offence both Ways.

Ans. Yet I suppose, let the case be *rightly examined*, and it will be found, that the great Offence given, is to the weak, who by our unreasonable use of our Liberty, of which they are not so well satisfied, are in danger of stumbling at our Practice. And both *Christian Prudence* and *Charity*, would dictate to us, that it is good, that we lay not a stumbling-block before them. And then, if others take offence at our condescending to the weakness of such, (which is according to Scripture-rule) they unjustly take offence: And for any to take offence at our *walking Charitably* towards our weak Brethren, that they must account for. We need not fear being called to account for others offence unjustly taken.

(2.) The more *predominant love we have to God*, and Jesus Christ, the more we shall fear giving Scandal. The more lively and strong our love is, the greater will be our care to walk in all the Commandments of the Lord, blameless. So we shall be more concern'd for the Glory of God, for the Honour and Interest of Christ. These will ly very near our Hearts, It will be a great grief to us, when others make light of transgressing God's holy Laws, when any professing Christianity do blemish their Profession, and cause the Name of the Lord to be blasphemed, when any by giving Scandal, do cause the way of truth to be evil-spoken of. Then how cutting to our Hearts would it be, should we fall into Scandal?

(3.) Let it be our great care to *walk in the fear of God*. That would be another special preservative from Scandal, Neh. 5. 9. *It is not good that ye do: Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the Heathen our Enemies?* Shall not the fear of God keep us in awe, that we no more wickedly depart from him? While his fear is before our Eyes, shall we not dread casting his Law behind our backs; and so casting reproach on Religion, to the dishonour of his Name.

(4.) Let

(4.) Let us see that we have a *true love to the Souls of others*, and hearty desire, that they may be saved. How precious were our Souls in Christ's account, when he so willingly laid down his Life for our Redemption? And if we have a love to the Souls of others, should not our Prayer and Hearts desire be, that they may be saved? And should we not, (according to our Capacities) be desirous to *promote the Salvation of others*. But then, should we not *dread the Thoughts of laying any stumbling-blocks before them, to occasion their Sin and Ruin*.

(5.) Let us follow Christ's Counsel and Charge, *Matth. 18. 8, 9*. *Wherefore if thy Hand, or thy Foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee. And if thine Eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.* Whatsoever it is that offendeth us, or causeth us to offend (as the Word is translated, *1 Cor. 8. 13. and Mark 9. 43. in the Margin*) how near, or dear soever; how profitable, or pleasing soever it may seem to us; let us *away with it*. Thus we must do with our darling Lusts; without mortifying Lusts within, in all likelihood they will *break out*, will cause us so to offend, as to be Offences unto others. A Man's *strongest Temptations are from within*. *Jam. 1. 14*. *Every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust and enticed.*

(6.) Get a tender Conscience, and *keep Conscience tender*, not to allow of the least Sin. 'Tis good to fear those Things, that have the *appearance of Evil*; that we have *cause to suspect* are sinful, or that we have found occasions of Sin. Not to be like the *Scribes and Pharisees* who strained at a Gnat, and swallowed a Camel, (*Matth. 23. 24*). But when from a truly tender Conscience, you dare not allow of the least known Sin; there is great hope, you will be far from allowing or giving up your selves to the Commission of gross, apparent Evils.

(7.) Look to your Hearts, that they be sincere and upright, *Phil. 1. 10*. That ye may be *Sincere, and without Offence*. But as the *lame are most subject to stumble*, so it may be expected, that Souls that are not found, or upright, will be halting and stumbling in their Course. Let it be our constant care, study, and endeavour *to walk uprightly*, taking God's holy Word for our Rule, and setting his Glory before us, as our chief Scope and End; so we might be *lights in the World* and Examples to help others on in an holy Course; *not stumbling blocks to others*. But 'tis no wonder, if they whose Hearts are not upright, *are turning aside into crooked Ways*. Ordinarily they are free from giving Scandal, whose Hearts are freest from the mixture of base, corrupt Ends, and in whom there is no allowed Guile; such as in *Simplicity, and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, have their Conversation in the World*.

(8.) Take heed of *Security, and self Confidence*. We are least safe when most secure. *David's security* betray'd him to the Temptation

and made way for his lamentable, shameful Fall. *Peter's self-confidence* failed him quite in the Hour of Temptation. He was left to himself, to confute his self-confidence, to let him see how weak he was in himself; and to teach us not to be high-minded, but always to fear. A presumptuous Confidence of their own standing, hath been the fall of many, of whom better Things were hoped.

(9.) Let a fear of falling keep us constantly on our Watch. *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall, 1 Cor. 10. 12. Prov. 8. 14. Happy is the Man that feareth alway.* That is jealous of his own Heart, and that feareth being circumvented, surprized with Temptations; and that at all Times, in all Places, Companies. Without great Caution, Watchfulness, and Circumspection, he that standeth, is certainly in danger of falling.

(10.) Watching here is not enough, but there must be earnest Prayer. *Matth. 26. 41. Watch and Pray that ye enter not into Temptation.* We have all need to pray, that God would keep us from falling. As the Psalmist, *Psal. 17. 5. Hold up my goings in thy Paths, that my Footsteps slip not.* The best upon Earth have need by Faith and Prayer, to take hold of the Lord, to be held up by him. *Psal. 5. 8. Lead me, O Lord, in thy Righteousness, because of mine Enemies, (or Observers, that watch for my halting,) Make thy Way straight (or plain, and smooth) before my face (that I may walk without stumbling, or offence)* as Mr. Pool in his Annotations.

(11.) Another Direction, upon which if I enlarge, is there not a cause? Let the commonness of Scandals, Stumbling-blocks, with the sad and woful Effects thereof, be matter of deep Mourning to us, be a Lamentation. While we cannot but mourn for the same, shall we not fear increasing so great Evils and Mischiefs? The mourners in Jerusalem, who did sigh and cry for the Abominations thereof, were kept from the Contagion of her Corruptions, as well as exempted from the exemplary Punishment that came upon others: See *Ezek. 9. 4* with *chap. 11. 16, &c.* The Corinthians that sorrowed after a godly Sort, for that great Scandal among them; what carefulness it wrought in them, and what clearing themselves? &c. That they approved themselves to be clear in that matter, *2 Cor. 7. 11.* And what cause of Mourning at this Day, upon account of Scandals? Wo to this Land, to this Generation, because of Offences.

(1.) Offences, Stumbling-blocks by great Ones, whose Examples have mighty influence among many. Says the Prophet *Jeremiah, chap. 5. I will get me unto the great Men, but these have altogether broken the Yoke, and burst the Bonds: Great Men are leading Men, many ready to follow them.* When they are Stumbling-blocks, they are great Stumbling-blocks.

(2.) Offences by false Teachers, or blind Guides. How sad is it, when the leaders of a People cause them to err? As the Prophet *Isaiah* com-

complained, *chap. 9. 16.* Sad indeed, when such as take upon them to be *Spiritual Guides*, are *Stumbling-blocks*. *Matth. 18. 14.* *If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the Ditch.* The false Prophet is a *snare of a Fowler*, in all his Ways, *Hos. 9. 8.* How sad, when any take on them the Office of the Ministry; who by their Office are obliged to shew unto Men the Way to Salvation, and to go before them by an holy Example: How sad, when any such shall either, 1. By corrupt Doctrine, taint Men's Judgments, and mislead them into dangerous Errors. Or, 2. By a Malignant misrepresentation of the Way of Holiness, shall seek to prejudice their hearers Minds, and turn their Hearts against it. Or, 3. By preaching smooth Things, shall strengthen the Hands of the Wicked, that he should not turn from his wicked way, by promising him Life. Or, 4. By a vicious Course of Life, shall encourage others to be vicious. That was an heavy charge brought in against the false Prophets. *Jer. 23. 15.* *From the Prophets of Jerusalem, is profaneness gone forth into all the Land.* So against the Priests *Mal. 2. 8.* *Ye are departed out of the Way, ye have caused many to stumble at the Law.* 'tis sad, when a Shepherd infecteth the Flock. Wo to the treacherous, unfaithful, or blind Guide, that leadeth others out of the Way. And wo to those poor Souls, who are led by such one.

(3.) Offences by the common Multitude. Alas! Do not the most take sad Ways? And how many, that fear no Colours, while they can say, *they do as the most do?* Following a Multitude in Evil, is following the course of this World. But surely, the more common Sin is, the greater cause there is of Mourning, and Humiliation. That profane Swearing, Whoredom, Drunkenness, &c. are so common, this emboldens many in such wicked Practices.

(4.) Offences, Scandals by Professors. Oh what cause of Mourning upon this account? May it not be feared, that Religion suffereth more by the falls of Professors, than by the fury of Persecutors? Some have been gained to a love of the Truth, and true Religion; to an hearty embracing and owning of it, by the gracious carriage of God's faithful Saints and Servants, under their Sufferings; by their Faith and Patience, and suffering with joyfulness. When many have been harden'd in an ill Opinion of Religion, have grown in a greater averſation from it, by the scandalous Practices of some, that had appear'd Zealous for it. Oh how sad, when wicked Ones are comforted by such, are more encouraged in their evil Ways As to see Professors addicted to sinful Pleasures and Pastimes, Gaming, Tipling, Drinking, &c. As if instead of endeavouring to bring the World up to Religion, they were rather bringing Religion down to the Course and Manners of the World.

Take all together, and how many Scandal-givers are there?

And then how many Scandal-takers? Whose case also calls to Mourning. As,

1. Some are tempted even to Atheism itself.
2. Others tempted to Popery, and other gross, pernicious Errors.
3. Others upon the miscarriages of some particular Minister, or Ministers, are tempted and brought to a contempt of the very Office of the Ministry.
4. Some upon the miscarriage of this, or that particular Professor, come to have hard Thoughts of all; even of the soundest, strictest, and most conscientious. Some ready to censure the best Christians, as no better than Hypocrites. And so prejudiced against Religion itself.

By these few Instances we may perceive what *lamentable Work* Offences both given and taken, do make in the World. Now the deeper Sense, and Resentment we have of the great evil of Scandals; the more hope there is, that we shall make it our care to shun, and avoid them.

(12.) The last Direction. Be well aware what Scandals, Stumbling-blocks are common in these evil Times, we are fallen into, and be very watchful against the same. The ninth Direction for watchfulness was more General; now I would here descend to Particulars, if the Lord would help me to speak more home. Where we see others fall before our Eyes, should we not take warning by their Falls? Then,

(1.) Take heed of countenancing, keeping Company with, and imitating *profane Scoffers*. Such as *ridicule Religion*, and religious Exercises, and make sport with the Holy Scriptures, with the *Articles* of the Christian Faith, the Blessed Trinity, the *Deity*, and *Satisfaction* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and his coming to Judgment, &c. Such as to whom those great and weighry Truths are but as *idle Tales*: And such as make a Mock at religious Fasting and Humiliation, and praying by the Spirit, &c. *come not near the Tents* of such Heaven-daring wretches.

(2.) Take heed of such *Immoralities*, as many of the Heathens would detest. What gross Scandal is it, to have fellowship with the *Workers of Iniquity* in the palpable Deeds of darkness.

(3.) Take not up with a *vain Religion*, that resteth in meer Notions, and Opinions; or in some formal Devotions, or meer Superstition. A *dead Religion*, which will not profit them that are occupied therein.

(4.) Take heed of a *false Zeal* in promoting *Divisions*, and dissentions amongst Brethren; who agree in the main, and in Things necessary; only differing in lesser Points, and Circumstances. For Christians to live in Discord, and exasperating the Spirits one of another with *uncharitable Censures*, when their difference in Opinion, or Practice is not so great; but that there ought to be *mutual Forbearance*, this hath an *ill Aspect*. Such Discord is a great Scandal and Offence; that tends to weaken the Interest of Religion, *raggering* some of its Friends, *making sport to its Adversaries*.

(5.) Let none be for urging their Brethren unto Things not necessary, indifferent at best; but in the account of some of their Brethren are sinful. In the Canons of 1640. in the Reign of King Charles the first, when Bowing towards the Altar was proposed, yet it was not imposed, but left to Men's Liberty, according to that Rule of Charity, Rom. 14. 3. *Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not, and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth.* Here it may be queried, whether to impose things not necessary, but in the Opinion of some not warrantable, be not to lay a stumbling-block before them, who are not satisfied, that they are indifferent, or lawful? Suppose it to be their Weakness, not to see the warrantableness of the Things imposed; yet how can they conform in such case without Sin, while they are not fully persuaded in their own Mind, that the things are indifferent, or lawful? See Rom. 14. 5, 23.

(6.) Tho' we are sometimes to part with our own Right, and to forebear the use of our Liberty; that we may not occasion others to Sin, and thus be injurious to their Souls; yet we must take heed of omitting our Duty under such a pretence, that some would make that an occasion of their Sin. As we may not do evil that good may come; so neither may we cast off the Thing that is good, neglect our Duty, to prevent some ill use others would make of it. Daniel would pray, and give Thanks before his God, as he did afore time, (Dan. 6. 10.) tho' his Enemies were ready to watch him, and to inform against him, which they did, and it was wickedly done of them. Some take Offence at the Word preach'd: Some come to it, only to carp and cavil; some are sinfully prejudic'd against faithful Ministers, when they hear their unsound Opinions laid open, and refuted, they take Offence when they are told the Truth; and some have their Choler moved, and are full of Indignation, when their Sins are laid open in their Colours; yet God's Ministers must faithfully dispense his Word, tho' it be an occasion of increasing, and aggravating the Sins of many. Whosoever they are, that take Offence at a Minister, or Christian doing his Duty, 'tis unjust, and they are blame worthy, who take Offence at one that is in the Way of his Duty. But let Ministers, and Christians both, fear really giving Offence to others, fear occasioning others to stumble and fall into Sin, by their declining their Duty.

(7.) And as you would not Stumble, and give Scandal, and Offence to others, take heed of interfering in your Course and Practice. Here my Thoughts are upon that Text, Prov. 4. 12. *When thou goest (that is, in right paths) thy steps shall not be straitned.* When a way is so narrow, that as one walks or runs, he is striking one Foot against the other; 'tis no strange thing if he stumbles and falls. Let it be our care to walk evenly, in a course of Uniform Obedience, that our Steps be not straitned, that there be no interfering. But for any to seem to have a respect to Duties of the first Table, with a neglect of second Table Duties, that is interfering. So on the other Hand, for one to suffer the Works of his

particular Calling, to juggle out the Duties of his general Calling, that is interfering. So for any to take up with reading the Scriptures, and some private Devotion at home, when they ought to be attending on God's publick Worship and Ordinances, that is interfering: And he that turneth away his Ear from hearing the Word, cannot expect a Blessing on his private Exercises, even his Prayer may be abomination to the Lord, (whose Law, and holy Institutions he doth so despise) Prov. 28. 9. Yea, suppose one spendeth more time in reading good Books, and religious Exercises, than his outward Circumstances would admit of, so that he neglected the Duty of providing for his Family; even such a course of Practice were interfering (tho' there are very few that halt of that Sore.)

(8.) Take heed that you do not *stumble at the Cross*. The Cross is a great Stumbling-block to many. Many boggle at it. Many are so affrighted, that they dare not enter on the Profession of Christianity. And many it knocks off: They dare not hold on. *Matth. 13. 21.* When Tribulation or Persecution ariseth, they have not courage to keep their Ground, to hold fast the Profession of the Faith; and their falling tends to discourage others.

It concerns us to get well prepared for Sufferings, even upon this account, that we give no occasion of Offence to others.

But, 1. On the one Hand, let Christians *take heed of running rashly upon Sufferings*, on their own Heads, without a call to suffer; that were an Offence. *Let none suffer as an Evil-doer, or as a busy-body, or as rash, and heady.* *Died Abner as a Fool?* Christians should not suffer as Fools, but as the Children of Wisdom. They should not *make their own Crosses*; but take up the Cross, when there is no avoiding it, without declining their Duty, without adventuring upon Sin. 'Tis clear, that we ought to *chuse Suffering rather than Sin*. So,

2. On the other Hand, Christians should take heed of shrinking, flinching, when their Profession comes to be tried. To be offended at the Cross, that is giving Offence to others. Let not us by faint-heartedness in Christ's cause, cause others Hearts to faint.

3. And Christians should *glorifie God in and under their Sufferings*. We should fear dishonouring God, discrediting our Profession by an unsuitable carriage under the Cross; least that way we prove an Offence, a Stumbling-block to others. We should see that *we suffer as Christians*, both as to the cause and the manner of our Suffering. As to the cause of our Suffering; that it is for Christ sake, for the Gospel sake, for Righteousness sake, that we suffer. And as to the manner of our Suffering, that we be Patient in Tribulation, 1 Pet. 2. 20. yea, it would become us, when we suffer in so good a Cause, to be joyful in Tribulation. Rejoicing, if we may be counted worthy to suffer for Christ, 1 Pet. 4. 16. Many in Times of Persecution, seeing how undaunted Christians were under their sharpest Sufferings, have been convinced of something more than ordinary in the Christian Religion, and have

come to enquire after Christ, and to embrace and accept of him, with his Cross. But if his followers appear dejected, and dispondent under the Cross, were not that the way to fright others from him, rather than to invite, and draw them to him?

Thus far I have gone, to prevent Scandals, Offence given.

In the next place, let us be warned and watchful, that we *take no Offence*. Let us stand upon our Guard, when Offences come, to prevent their making any *ill Impression* on us. Let it be our care, that we be not *scandalized*.

I would not that you should mistake me, When I am warning you against the sin of taking Offence, upon others giving Offence; my meaning is not, that you should not be grieved, and displeased at sin where you see it. 'Tis *our Duty* (without doubt) *to mourn*, not only for our own Sins, but also the Sins of others. We have many approved Examples in holy Writ, of such as were true mourners for others Sins. And to be *offended at others giving Offence*, or Scandal is good. And where is our love to God, or Zeal for God, and against Sin; in that which is such an Offence against God, and so displeasing to Him, be not displeasing to us? (2 Cor. 12. 21.)

But to take Offence, to be Scandalized, or offended, as it is sinful, and prejudicial Souls, is quite another Thing.

Offence taken, as *contra distinct* from *Offence given*, is a *taking occasion* from what one sees or hears *scandalous* in others, (or reputes to be so) for there is Offence taken, sometimes when no Offence or Scandal was really given: But (as I said) it is a *taking occasion* to be *offended at Christ*, (Matth. 11. 6. and chap. 13. 57.) or *offended at the Truth*, at the Profession, or Practice of Christianity, (Matth. 13. 21.) or to be *hinder'd from*, or in *ones duty*, to be weaken'd, and discouraged from owning that which is right, (Matth. 26. 31.) or to be *drawn into Error*, or *Sin in Practice*, (Rom. 14. 21. 2 Cor. 11. 29.) or to be *harden'd in Sin*, or to be offended to such an height, as to turn Apostates and Persecutors, (Mat. 24. 10.)

This taking Offence, or being Scandalized may be distinguished.

(1.) From the *different Principle* whence it ariseth. So taking Offence is either from such Weakness and Infirmary, as may stand with Sincerity, and uprightness in the main. And the best upon Earth are short of perfection both in Grace and Knowledge. Or there is taking Offence from a far worse Principle, even from the predominancy of Corruption, and an unsound and wicked Heart. When the former take Offence, 'tis besides their Purpose. But as to the latter, their taking Offence is studied and wilful: And many times they are glad of any occasion they can meet with. The former as the Disciples, Matth. 26. 31. *Offended, upon a sudden surprize*. The latter, as the Pharisees, Matth. 15. 12. *upon a rooted prejudice* against Christ, his Doctrine, and Works.

(2.) From the *different Degree*, and extent of the Offence taken. Some are scandalized only so far, as to fall into some particular sin, or Error.

Error. Like Barnabas, Gal. 2. 13. Like slipping with one Foot: Some again are so scandalized, as to fall from a Christian course: Like Demas, who (at least for a time) fell off to embrace this present World. Stumbling, and falling down right.

(3.) From the diffusing Event and Issue following. Some are scandalized and fall, who yet rise again by Repentance. As Peter was offended at Christ's being apprehended and prosecuted as a Criminal: He fell, and that so foully, as to deny his Lord and Master; yet he quickly bethought himself, repented, and wept bitterly; and soon after was found preaching Christ boldly and zealously. Some again are so offended, that they fall off quite: They fall so, as to rise no more. Like those, John 6. 66. From that time many went back, and walked no more with him?

Now against taking Offence, (for the preventing, or remedying of that great Evil) take a few awaking, and moving Considerations. And then some Directions.

First, It may be of good use to lay the following Considerations before you.

(1.) Consider whether Mens taking Offence be not generally from a bad Cause and Principle. As,

(1.) They that are wont to put the hardest Construction upon others Words and Actions; they that are for taking Things in the worst Sense, cannot be thought to love their Neighbour, or Brother as Themselves; or to walk by that golden Rule, whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them. Does not such taking Offence bewray great uncharitableness, and want of love to their Brother.

(2.) Many that are very forward to take notice of what they can see amiss in others, and to pass severe Censures on others, would do better to look more at home, to see what is amiss in themselves, to cast the first stone at themselves. There may be too good a Conceit of themselves, and a Spirit of Pride, that oft puts Men upon judging, and censuring others; which the Apostle James forbiddeth, chap. 3. 1. My Brethren, be not many Masters.—

(3.) And sometimes a Spirit of Envy puts Men forward to speak evil of others, whom they would have ill thought of; towards whom they have an evil Eye. An envious Spirit is certainly an evil Spirit.

(4.) And what Hypocrisie is there, where any are very forward to speak of, and spread abroad others faults, in hopes that they may be better thought of; or that their own faults might have some cover; or less notice may be taken of them.

(5.) But what a Spirit of Malignity against God and Godliness, against Christ and Christianity appears in those, that take occasion from the calls of Professors to let fly against Religion, and Godliness itself? Saying, these are your godly People; and this is their Religion: As if Religion was to be blamed for the faults of those that cross its holy Rules. Shall any dare to say, that the holy God is in fault, when Men break his Righteous

Righteous Laws? Or that the Holy Jesus is in fault, when any that are called Christians, walk not as becometh the Gospel of Christ? Such as loudly & claim against any scandalous Offence of a Professor do not therein shew their indignation against Sin; but rather bewray their enmity against God and Christ, and Religion; if they can easily bear with, or pass by greater Enormities of the vilest, and most obstinate Sinners, that appear harden'd in Wickedness.

(6.) And what a diabolical Spirit possesseth such as rejoice and take Pleasure in the Sins of others? While they make themselves sport at the lamentable falls of others, they are without Sense, that this is taking offence in an high degree. Such little think what hurt they receive, and how mischievous their rejoicing in iniquity is like to prove to their Souls unless they come truly to repent, and change their note from Laughter to Mourning, from Rejoicing to Lamentation. There are several Ways of taking Offence: But it is from no good Cause, or Principle that Men take Offence, which should make us watchful against it.

(2.) Look upon the Thing in itself, and as giving, so taking Offence is evil in itself. Suppose Offence given, that will not justify or excuse our taking Offence. Tho' *ceteris paribus*, they are more inexcusable, who take Offence where none is given; yet where Offence is given, 'tis culpable and blame worthy for any to take Offence in the Sense we are speaking off. When Peter was giving Offence unto Christ by laying a Stumbling-block before our Blessed Saviour, to take him off from Suffering, which was necessary in order to our Redemption, Christ was highly displeased at the Motion; but far from being scandalized, Matth. 16. 22, 23. Again, Peter gave Offence, or Scandal to Barnabas and others, when he withdrew and separated from the Gentiles. It was a fault in him, that by his Example he laid a snare before them; yet they were to blame, who took Offence in following his Example, Gal. 2. 12, 13. We are not to follow such, as would lead us out of the right Way, whosoever they be. Scandalizers do not force us to follow them; tho' their Practice is a Snare, and Temptation, an occasion of Sin to many. But 'tis our fault, if we catch and burst by their fall. We should make a good use of Scandal given. Others miscarrying should be a warning to us. And when some rejoice at their tripping, and stumbling, we should rather mourn.

(3.) As taking Offence is sinful, so 'tis not a little prejudicial unto Souls. Though we should not be so unhappy, as to be quite turned out of God's way, out of the Way to Heaven by Scandals given; yet when we are stumbling upon such occasion, that will be some hindrance to us in the Way. But how sad is the case of those, who by Scandals are quite turn'd off from the way of Godliness? Thus the Sin of such proves greater, and more deadly mischievous, than the Sin of some, who had given great Scandal. Some who have given Scandal, yet through God's abundant Grace have been brought to true Repentance; so that their Iniquity is not their ruin. Whereas the o-

whether that take Offence, so as to be utterly prejudiced against true Religion and Godliness, go on in their Sin, and perish in their enmity to God, and his holy Ways: Which is, as if, because another hath fallen, and broken his Leg, they care not, though they fall so as to break their Necks.

(4.) Consider that *stumbling by Offence taken, hath oft ill effects upon others.* This also hath a tendency towards others hurt. *Wo to the World because of Offences.* Scandal both given and taken is big with Mischiefs. A growing, multiplying Evil. As Sampson with his Jaw-bone slew heaps upon heaps. One falleth, and gives Offence, and others stumble at him; and then others stumble at them. Thus Scandals are propagated. And the scandalized become Scandals to others. Now considering that passive Scandal, or stumbling by offence taken, is from no good Principle, and is evil in itself, and hath ill effects on ourselves, and on others also; is there not great reason, that we should be very careful to shun it.

Take a few Directions to prevent your taking Offence, that you be not this way hinder'd in a Christian Course.

(1.) *Be well grounded,* as to the truth and certainty of the Christian Religion. Be well satisfied, that it is the sure way to Eternal Life and Happiness. So others swerving from it, should have no such *ill influence on you*, as to work in you a *suspicion*, or *dislike* of it, or *disaffection* towards it. Seeing your way clear, you should not be in that danger of falling at those stumbling-blocks, that overthrow the faith of those, who are unsettled, to their Soul's ruin.

(2.) *Get experience* of having fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, (1 John 1. 3.) And labour to grow in spiritual Experience. If you know by experience what it is to enjoy Communion with God in his good Ways; if you oft find his Gracious, Quickening, Comforting Presence in Holy Duties, in his Ordinances; how strange were it, if you should come to take Offence, and cast off Ordinances? *If you have tasted that the Lord is Gracious*; how strange, if yet you should take distaste, and be offended at him? Tho' Christ crucified was a great stumbling-block to many; yet after the Apostle came to know Christ by experience, and was partaking of the saving Fruits of his Cross, he would no more glory in any thing opposite unto, or separate from Christ and him Crucified, Gal. 6. 14. Would one that hath frequent experience of God's hearing and answering Prayer, after all, cast off Prayer? The more that Souls are acquainted with the ways of God, (tho' some cry them down, and lay them aside, as *forms* and *beggerly Elements*) the more hope that such will keep close to them. They would not be offended, whatever *Apostates* do on one Hand, and *Persecutors* on the other, to take them off.

(3.) Let others Offences, stumbling and falling, make you more *jealous of your selves*, and more watchful over your Hearts, and Ways: When we see others fall, as giving or taking Offence, it should mind us of our liableness to miscarry.

(4.) So

(4.) Be earnest with God in Prayer, that he would watch over you. O, what need, by Prayer daily to commit our selves to his conduct, and keeping. *He keepeth the feet of his Saints.* 'Tis good for us to put our selves into his Hands, who of our selves are so apt to fall. *Jer. 31. 9. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the Rivers of Waters, in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble.*

(5.) Against Offences, or taking Offence by example; get a sincere love to God's Law, to his Holy Word: That will help you to keep your Eye on his Word, as your Rule. So you will not be for following others, wherein they depart from the Rule. So far as you find they go cross to this Rule, whether in their Opinions, or Practice, you will look on others Example, as a *Sea-mark*, that you are to shun; not as a *Way-mark*, that you should follow. The falls of eminent Saints are recorded in Scripture (as of Noah, Lot, David, &c.) not for our Imitation, but for our Admonition, and Caution. These inform us, that the example of the best upon Earth, is not in all Things to be followed. But we have a *more sure Word* of Prophecy, whereunto ye do well if ye take heed. *Psal. 17. 4. Concerning the Works of Man, by the Word of thy Lips, I have kept me from the Paths of the destroyer.* So long as God's Word is in due Credit, Authority, and Esteem with us, we shall be far from imagining, that the Judgment, or Practice of Men, how great soever, or of how great note soever for Learning, or Piety, can warrant us in any Thing not allowed by God's Holy Word.

(6.) Against taking Offence to the rendring of us *uncharitable*, and too rash, or too severe in censuring our Brethren; let us see that our love to others be Real, in Truth, without Dissimulation. True love will teach, and incline us to take notice of the good, we have any ground to hope is in them; and not only of the evil. So it will incline us to cover, or lessen others faults; rather than to proclaim, and aggravate them. Love would help us to bear one anothers burdens. 'Tis not for laying on more load. It would incline us to pity, and pray for, and to endeavour the restoring of such as are fallen (where there is Hope, and Opportunity.) It would not suffer us to insult over, to trample on them. And it would not allow us to take Offence at others for some small difference. In doubtful cases we are to exercise *forbearance*; and not to judge, or despise our Brethren. Be it so, that they are under some lesser mistakes; to bear with their Weakness is more suitable to the Law of Love, and that Christian concord, which ought to take place amongst Christians; than heats and Animosities about tolerable differences would be.

(7.) Make not your own private Sentiments a standard, or Rule, whereby to try and judge other Men. There is a great diversity in Men's capacities and apprehensions; as a great variety in their Faces and Complexions. Some have a greater Latitude in their Judgments, than

than perhaps we have; accounting some Things *lawful*, which we look upon as *sinful*. Now though if we do that which we judge to be *sinful*, we therein *act against our Consciences*; yet we may not therefore conclude, that others *act against their Consciences*, in doing that Thing, who possibly may judge the same to be *lawful*. And though they hear our Reasons to the contrary, (and those Reasons be never so *valid*,) yet their minds may be *prepossessed*, so as not to see the Strength and validity thereof; upon which account they may still hold the Thing *lawful*, without deserving the charge or censure of *wilful Obstinacy*. This is a great dividing principle (with Mr. *Jeremiah Burrough's* *Irenic. p. 95.*) If others be against what we conceive to be *Truth*, we may judge them going against their own *Light, and Conscience*. Which (as he says) makes Men that differ, to have exceeding hard Thoughts of one another.

(8.) Abhor that most uncharitable, unjust censure of those, that condemn the Generation of the Righteous, for some foul miscarrying of this, or that Professor; as some will say, *They are all alike*. So abhor that most false, and diabolical Sentence of those, that let fly at Religion, and cast reproach upon it, saying, *This is their Religion*. Such take Offence with a Witness, in a very desperate manner; shewing themselves highly prejudiced against Religion, and against the Generation of the Righteous; as also for prejudicing others against the same, so far as they can. This Sin of theirs is of an *Hell-black hue*, and has a most *malign Aspect*. Such are wont to watch for the halting of any Professor of Religion, that (Satan-like) they might be *accusers of the Brethren*. But to condemn the whole Generation for the miscarriages of some that make a Profession, is against *Justice and Equity, as well as against Charity*. 'Tis granted, that there are, and ever have been *Hypocrites* in the visible Church. But they that say of God's People, they are *all alike*, a pack of dissembling Hypocrites; they shall be found *Liar*s. There was a *Judas* even in *Christ's own Family*; but one would think, none but the *Father of lies* should have a Face to say, *They were all Judasses*. It must further be granted, that a godly Man hath sometimes fallen into a foul, scandalous Sin. Not that such a one *liveth in known, gross Sin*. *Noah* was once overtaken, and overcome with *Wine*; yet not a *Wine-bibber*, not a *common Drunkard*. There is a difference betwixt a godly Man falling into Sin, who repenteth of it, and turneth from it; and a wicked Man, that persists in his Wickedness, such a one as goeth on still in his *Trespases*, *Psal. 68. 21.* But how void of common Sense, and Reason, how absurd are they, who are ready to fall upon Religion, when any Professor is guilty of any scandalous Sin? Our Religion is far from teaching Men so. Surely, none should blame Religion for the Scandals given by some Professors; but such are to be blamed, who are not careful to order their Lives according to its holy Precepts. Now they that are for casting reproach upon Religion, would seem to be for no Religion, would teach Men to cast off all Religion, and to

turn plain *Atheists*. As they cannot inform us of any Religion profess'd in the World; but there are some of very bad Practices, that own it. Indeed a Religion, that by its Principles, and Doctrines doth a open gap to Scandalous, and evil Practices (as th^t of the Pharisees, and that of the Papists, as Mr. Fer. Dyke observes, of scandals, p. 39.) such a Religion may justly be blamed. But not so the true Religion. The true Religion is pure, Jam. 1: 27. You will not blame the Art of writing, for the foul blots, which a careless, or unskilful writer makes.

(9.) Shun the Company of such as are Disorderly, Loose-livers, and such as are known to be for enticing, and ensnaring others; would make others like Themselves. Prov. 4. 14, 15. Enter not into the Path of the Wicked, and go not in the way of evil Men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. There is need to use the greatest Caution, and resolution to avoid the Company of such; that you learn not their ways, that you get not a snare to your Souls. Needless associating with them, may be an encouraging, and hardening of them in their evil Course. And thus you may be stumbling-blocks, really give Offence to them, may be injurious to their Souls; even when they are well enough pleased to have you their Companions in their disorderly Course. And then are you not in the Way to be drawn in, and caught by them? Take heed of touching pitch, if you would not be despised. Oh, how many have been ruined to all intents and purposes, by being linked in with bad Companions? A Companion of Fools shall be destroyed. See what Company the holy Psalmist was for, Psal. 119. 63. I am a Companion of all them that fear thee: And of them that keep thy Precepts. In such Company you may hope to be getting good, and not hurt.

(10.) Seeing this World is so full of snares, labour to get more above the World. The more our Souls are upon the wing, taking their flight Heaven-wards, the safer we should be from those snares here below. And should not faithful Christians long to be taken up to that Heavenly Society above, whose Light and Love is perfect, who are freed from all Temptations, and occasions of Stumbling? Should they not long for that glorious Day, when the Son of Man shall send forth his Angels to gather out of his Kingdom all Things that offend, and them which do Iniquity, Matth. 13. 41. If by faith we were got more above the World, and were more in Heaven in our Meditations, Desires, Affections, if our Hearts were more set upon Heaven; there would be more hope of our escaping the peril and mischief of Scandals, and the Snares of Hell here below.

Thus far for Caution against giving, or taking Offence, both which are sinful, and mischievous.

Use 2. Now I shall conclude with a Word or two of Exhortation.

(1.) You that love God's Law, do what in you lieth to prevent others running upon these dangerous Rocks. Love to God, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, love to the Interest and reputation of Religion

and love to the Souls of others require it; that in our Places, according to our Capacities, as we have Opportunity, we endeavour to prevent Sin, so to prevent Scandals. O that Christians would consider one another, exhort one another, watch over one another! *Heb. 10. 24, 25.* and chap. 3. 12, 13. Were Christians mindful of the care they ought to have one of another, as *Members of the same Body*; 'tis possible, that Scandals would not be so common. O that Christians now in these our Days, were like those, commended by the Apostle, *Rom. 15. 14. Full of Goodness, filled with Knowledge,* (in all the necessary Points of Faith and Christian Practice) *able and ready also to admonish one another.* Such would not be for scandalizing their Brethren; but for the preventing of Scandals, what in them lay. *1 Thes. 5. 14. Now we exhort (or beseech) you, Brethren, warn them that are unruly, (disorderly) comfort the feeble Minded, support the Weak.* Should not fellow-members be helpful to one another, and sympathize one with another? And mutual love and helpfulness would shew Christians to be living Members of Christ's Mystical Body.

(2.) You, who by the Grace of God are kept from giving Scandal, do what you can towards the removing of *Stumbling-blocks*, and towards the raising of such as are fallen, and have given great occasion of stumbling unto others. When a Fire breaks forth in a Town, it were very strange, if none would run to it, to put a stop to it. But how sad is it, that when any Scandal happens, many make a sport of it. Many are forward to spread abroad the report of it, without being at all concern'd for the Soul of one that hath given Scandal, or for the Souls of others that may get harm thereby. But let our love to God's Law, and to such Souls, appear in our hearty endeavours to prevent the ruin of Souls.

So, (1.) Let us pray, that the Lord would give them sound and thorough Repentance, who have in such a manner offended God, and given Offence to others, have by their fall laid a *stumbling-block* before others. Such as may deserve exclusion from the Society of Christians, till they give good evidence of their Repentance, (so far as Man can judge) yet are not to be shut out of our Prayers.

(2.) Let us take warning by others Falls; and be excited to more circumspect, and exemplary Walking. To be so far from having fellowship with others in the unfruitful Works of darkness; as to set others an Example. *Whatever Things are True, are Honest, are Just, are Pure, are lovely, are of good Report, are Vertuous, and praise-worthy, let us seriously Mind, and diligently follow these Things.*

(3.) And should we not mourn for the Sin, and mourn over the sad case of such as give Scandal? They were reprov'd, *1 Cor. 5. 2.* for making so light of the foul error of the incestuous Person, and that they did not mourn. When by their mourning for his so shameful miscarriage, they might have been furthering on his penitential Sorrow for what he had done. We are told, that when any of *Pythagoras's* Scholars made ill proof, fell off from his vertuous Precepts to a vicious course, there

was a solemn mourning for such, as for the Dead. The primitive Christians would wail over such as were to be excommunicate, as over them that were Dead. See Dr. Hammond's Annot. on 1 Cor. 5. 2.

(4.) 'Tis not enough to mourn over such as have given Scandal, to bewail their fall; but so far as we are in a capacity, and may not be without hope of Success; we should be ready to put to our helping Hands by fraternal correption, and admonition to endeavour their Reduction and Recovery. And certainly, you might have more Comfort in such Pious and Charitable endeavours to gain a Brother (Mat. 18. 15.) than others are like to find in going about to defame, and declaim against them behind their Backs. They are many to forward in passing Censures on others; who would do better, and might spend their time better, if they dwelt more at home.

(5.) Sure, we are to put a difference, where there is a great difference in the Persons, that give Scandal. Is there not a difference betwixt one that is overcome with a fault, that is surprized at unawares, and falls thro' a sore, sudden push of Temptation; and others that devise, contrive, and set themselves in a way of Sin? Is there not a difference betwixt one, who is overcome with a Temptation offered, to commit a great Sin; but then reflecting upon what he has done, he is full of inward grief and shame, repents, loaths himself, and is ready to blush to shame himself; I say, is there no difference betwixt such a one, and others that are in league with their Lusts, and in effect say, we have loved strangers, and after them we will go? Is there not a difference betwixt one, who (thro' carelessness) falls into the Mire; but is not for resting there, but bestireth himself to get out of it, and is cleansed from it; and others that lie still in that filthy pickle, and to wallow in the Mire? As there is a difference betwixt a Sinner, that is truly sensible of his sin and guilt, afflicted in Conscience, and is groaning under the burden of his sin; and a senseless, sottish, hardened Sinner? When the former is to be tenderly dealt with, the like method is not so proper to be taken with the latter. When the case of the former calleth for lenity, gentleness; there is need of sharpness and severity to be shewed towards the other; Jude v. 22, 23. Of some have Compassion making a difference. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the Fire.

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A Word more. One that had given great Scandal, upon sufficient evidence of his Repentance, should be restored to Communion with the Church. And Christians ought to be ready to testify their Reconciliation, hearty Love and Affection, unto such an Offender, when penitent. That too great severity should not be exercised towards such a one, for that he should be swallowed up of overmuch Sorrow. We have good Authority to shew for this; even such as all true Christians are bound to Reverence. See 2 Cor. 2. 7. -- Ye ought rather to forgive him (that is upon his Repentance) and comfort him, lest perhaps, such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch Sorrow.